

THE RELIGIOUS WILFRED OWEN: HIS POETRY AND HIS SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT

As a matter of fact, Wilfred's technique of uncovering the reality of war came through irony, sarcasm and his own unique para-rhyme style. This article indicates that Wilfred Edward Salter Owen (1893-1918) enrolled his specific style to raise serious questions concerning, religious institutions, Churchmen, war and even God Himself. Understandably Owen's opinions and his succeeding war poems were distinguished among other contemporary poets for being much more realistic, objective and truthful since his concerns were not ethnic, religious, sectarian, and sociopolitical, in fact it was universal and human. As an observant individual and nationality bound citizen Owen was not happy with the religious and the motive of war. Indeed, the combatants are portrayed as victims of the Church and Government in poems which are full of severely strong images including "Mental Cases", "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo", "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young", "At a Calvary Near the Ancre", "Dulce Et Decorum Est", "Inspection", "Greater Love", "Strange Meeting", and "Disabled". Most of his poems condemn the religious institutions and its leaders hugely and openly. And finally, Wilfred Owen considered WWI as a very complicated and substantial event.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, Church, First World War, Irony, Owen, Poetry, Religion, Religious War, Spirituality

INTRODUCTION

A very simple definition of poetry and its function is that poetry is the manifestation and expression of human thoughts, feelings and realizations of the poet about peculiar and particular situations and circumstances whether physical, psychological, sociopolitical, transcendental, or spiritual. War, religion and spirituality have been sources of a huge number of poems in addition to other literary works for many composers and writers in ancient as well as in modern world. The forms and expressions of such poetic and literary works have been changing with, regions, circumstances, and the passage of time. The totally unprecedented circumstances of the First World War provided a good platform for many poets to write on war. Few of them opposed it overtly, through objecting ideas conveyed in their poetry. In one of his works, describing the situation, stating that "what was going on in Europe between 1914 and 1918 was not just a story, it was among the darkest phases of the human history which cannot be forgotten" (Autogenesis 35), Hossein Omidī unveils the truth. Beyond doubt, the "perceptively provincial" and purely fascinating "little chap" Wilfred, was involved directly in the battle zone in action, and in his poetry (Egremont 165). In this context, Abrams remarks that "people were not prepared for such a huge earthquake. They were entirely unprepared for the shocks and revulsions of modern trench warfare, and the Great War wiped out practically a whole generation of young soldiers and civilians in the fronts and in cities. The Great War was so great that it shattered and traumatized so many illusions and ideals" (1826). Explicably Wilfred's opinions and his succeeding war poems were distinguished among other contemporary poets for being much more realistic, objective and truthful since his concerns were not ethnic, religious, sectarian, and sociopolitical, in fact it was universal and human. In this regard, Omidī perceptively observes that Owen "puts [his] appalling trench experiences into poetry. [He] served as

representative of what could happen to all soldiers on daily basis through adding a strong influential voice to the public discourse" (Homoeroticism120). As an observant individual and nationality bound citizen Owen was not happy with the religious and the motive of war. For him spirituality specifically and a religion in general should be able to answer the humanity concerned questions like "how can religion be defined in a realistic, pragmatic and even naturalistic way, and what a religion refers in reality?" For a complete human grasp of the world depends on the "naturalized citizens" and role of religion in as far as human knowledge is concerned. This can be linked with or seen in the light of the "metaphysical sentiment" presented by Ortega Gasset. It explains the need of religion as "the essential, ultimate, and basic impression which we have of the universe that describes how metaphysical sentiment acts as a foundation and support for our other activities, whatever they may be. No one lives without it, although its degree of clarity varies from person to person. It encompasses our primary, decisive attitude toward all of reality, the pleasure which the world and life hold for us" (Ortega 86-7). In this regard, Omid in one of his articles judiciously maintains that:

The blends and fusions of the elements of religious conviction and otherworldliness with warfare can be understood and examined with a public perspective that leads to this assumption that to defend the homeland and religious conviction is a divine obligation, though, this concept is unable to find its credibility for, forcibly, there are in a combat always no less than two sides, the aggressive and the defensive. However, it is obvious that psychologically, philosophically, and emotionally wars for religion, spirituality, conversions, cultural, ideological, or ethnic dominations, and to gain economic advances etc. become challengeable by most of the people who are involved directly or indirectly in wars as they cannot connect with them in any positive manner. (Projection 4)

Successively, trying to expose the carnages and outrages in the trenches, Owen composed many war poems reprimanding faith, spiritual and governmental ladder, opposed the divinity manipulated in war propaganda machine. Consequently, the outcome was that the young Wilfred accepted religion's influence on the common man, thus he deployed divinity, spirituality and whatever association to The Holy being as a mediator for creating compassion and sympathy as well as appreciation of those called to work for. Furthermore, backing the British patriotism and nationalism in the WWI, the religious establishments in the UK, playing a bigger role in the domestic sociopolitical scene and using its own plans, got more powerful than before. Anti-modernism is considered as an important outcome of this spiritual advancement. Similar to all other religious establishments, the Church of England had serious disputes with other institutions. Indeed, as a deviation, the Great War helped them to defeat their domestic and foreign rivals. Authors and lecturers raised their subject and worries further than, nationalism, patriotism, and chauvinism to a divine mission through linking to spiritual semantic and standards. Wilfred raised by the pious Susan Owen in an earnest Catholic household, and later he trained to be a lay assistant in the parish of Dunsden (Egremont 166). Quoting some examples from *Journey from Obscurity* (1965) by Wilfred's brother Harold, Stallworthy in his *Wilfred Owen* (1974), confirms the significance of Christianity to Owen in his childhood as he was visualizing himself a patriarch while supported and assisted by Susan who made altar cloths and a patriarch's mitre for him. As a youngster, Wilfred was presenting a sermon he had organized before the family on Sunday evens (39). His devotion to Christianity did not die with his childhood as he regarded the prospect of being a minister, before his registration in the British army (Wilkinson 113). Being interested, simultaneously, in both literature and religion, it was difficult for him to choose his career, as a clergyman or a poet. He writhed to settle what he experienced in the war with what he had learned in the ecclesiastical. However, all these dissimilarities were voiced in Owen's war poems in the future. Notwithstanding, this spiritual language and literature assisted satisfying houses of worship, but Owen identified its blunders. Albeit he did not follow his religious and spiritual background, he realized the

real power and impact of spirituality and religion on society and even himself.

DISCUSSIONS

The significance of language, which was employed by the mass media, administration, ministers and artists in most of the early phase of the Great War, was comprehended by Owen. Indeed, the acknowledgement of such an employment powered most of his poems, as a great deal of Owen's concentration was on the subject of faith. Condemning and disapproving the manipulation of faith and spirituality in the propaganda machine and demanding clearness and comprehensibility, Wilfred used his war poems for a higher cause that is peace and humanity and universal spiritualism. In fact, the religious institutions were utilizing the spiritual standards for conscription but Owen found their hypocrisy of conscription propaganda, however, he was exposing it in his poetry. Owen, concerning spirituality and religious beliefs, was always faithful to them in his war poems. Indeed, the influence of his spiritual background had such an extraordinary importance in his poetry that Owen imagined himself as a liberator and even redeemer. Douglas Kerr, in his article "Brothers in Arms: Family Language in Wilfred Owen" (1992), associates the above mentioned notion to his poems: "He took with him the myth of a healing redemption through speech. The war poems are really an attempt to reclaim people from self-destruction and insanity by speaking the truth" (96-97). As Owen was involved directly his focus in his poems was to share the truth genuinely with the civilians. Expanding this notion in his article, Daniel Hipp illuminates how it was necessary for Wilfred to deal with his history, trench experiences, as well as his spiritual upbringings so as to forge ahead. By doing so, "he could bring the content of his unconscious to the surface where it would be the subject of scrutiny, and as Owen had discovered by this point, artistic control" (33). Through dealing with the realities of the WWI, he was able to find the essential themes to create his prominent poems, which defied the warmongers in the Church and Government, in spite of his spiritual background. He followed his senior poet, Sassoon and described his remonstrance verses as "an act of courage, and said Sassoon's poems were "perfectly truthful descriptions of war" (Kerr, *Wilfred* 328).

Seemingly, the clerics were not following their teachings when they were urging the public to fight for Jesus and England, as they were not doing it themselves actually. Writing to Susan Owen, he overtly shows his detestation and unhappiness with the churchmen. As a reaction to the perception of "Christ's apparent command to suffer without retaliation," he considers that "pulpit professionals are ignoring it very skillfully and successfully" (Cavill et al 365). However, in his poems, he expresses an incongruity between what the clergy men claim and what he himself was witnessing in the trenches, where the priests who were repeating the spiritual assertions and linking devotion and religious conviction at home, totally absent. This incongruity directed to derision and mockery which Owen exposed in his war poems. This derision and mockery can be seen overtly in "At a Calvary Near the Ancre" by Owen that opens by a wayside calvary. These roadside calvaries were dispersed from corner to corner of the European rural area. Actually, the British troops were not used to see them alongside the countryside in Britain. These wayside calvaries symbolically assisted the combatants to recall their own misery and loss. Not only this verse alludes to the above mentioned concept but also, through it, Owen transparently denounces the intents of the Church and churchmen: "Near Golgotha strolls many a priest, /And in their faces there is pride /That they were flesh-marked by the Beast /By whom the gentle Christ's denied" (Breen 47). Indeed, a "priest" is introduced as an arrogant person, and through mentioning Golgotha as a reference of the crucifixion in the Bible, the poet indicates the hypocrisy and duplicity of the priest as well. Consistent with Jon Stallworthy in his book *Wilfred Owen* (1974), this has been stressed in Owen's mail to Susan, his mother, as Owen talks about combatants who are unaware "of the civilization that sends us there", and the priests who claim "it is good to be in that

Hell" (203). Calling them unaware or ignorant he is not blaming them, but for him the unfortunate combatants are only victims of the First World War. Undeniably, he accuses directly and consistently the Churchmen, the politicians as well as the Great War itself. In "Mental Cases" in which Owen brilliantly shows the psychological sufferings and struggles of the soldiers in the trenches, these charges and frustrations are obvious. This has been illustrated ferociously by Owen in these lines "Ever from their hair and through their hands' palms / Misery swelters," (lines 7-8) and "their eyeballs shrink tormented / Back into their brains" (19-20). There are some references of spiritual concepts, including "purgatorial shadows" as well as "Surely we have perished/Sleeping, and walk hell; but who these hellish?". The allusions to "purgatory" and "Hell" contradict the salvation and service philosophies. In "Mental Cases", through the cruel images and use of spirituality and religious convictions, the warfare has been condemned strongly by Owen. However, the concluding lines have more to tell us: "Thus their hands are plucking at each other; / Picking at the rope-knots of their scourging; / Snatching after us who smote them brother, / Pawing us who dealt them war and madness" (Breen 76-7). Here, active and strong verbal expressions used by Owen to show his condemnation. For instance, being in association with God's chastisement of sinners in the Bible "to smite" has spiritual implications. Furthermore, "brother" satirically and sarcastically refers to the Scriptural notion of "brothers in Christ" as its usage gives us the impression of frivolity and pessimism instead of the Biblical meaning of brotherhood. Including "dealt" in the concluding lines makes the Church warmongers responsible for the insanity of the combatants. "Dealt" is linked to the two objects to show the attachment of the eruption of the war to the costs. "Us" has been chosen fascinatingly, to allude to the enemies. In this point, Owen places himself among the people who deal and smite to be able to direct the audiences to condemn the cause. Even though Owen is clearly opposing the war however he takes the first person viewpoint ("Snatching after us" as well as "Pawing us") as an illustrative of his skill. By doing this Owen strongly condemns the Churchmen, the Government, and even the poets and authors too, including himself. His allegorical verse "At a Calvary Near the Ancre" is another example with the same theme. In keeping with Goldensohn Wilfred followed Siegfried's "lead in looking at the higher leadership with hostility and suspicion," and this verse establishes this power flawlessly (18). The crucifixion of Jesus is openly mentioned in the first four lines of the verse. Captivatingly, once more ironically and artistically, Wilfred appears to link Jesus to the suffering soldiers in the frontlines: "One ever hangs where shelled roads part, / In this war He too lost a limb, / But His disciples hide apart; / And now the Soldiers bear with Him (Breen 47). Through demonstrating that the "Soldiers" (capitalized) "bear" their anxieties and sufferings with "Him" (Christ), Jesus and the Soldiers are associated. Unlike the humiliated and less respected "disciples", who are responsible for the passion and death, in this stanza, Owen admires the "Soldiers" and honors their passions. He uplifts them to "His" (Jesus) level, even claims them innocent. From one hand, Owen points out the "Soldiers" valor and bravery in the battle field and their loyalty to Christ, and from the other hand, he indicates pusillanimity and infidelity of the "disciples." Consequently, he clarifies that, in the theater of the War, the system forces the "Soldiers", who are the real victims of the Churchmen and Politicians, to writhe and agonize, while the "disciples" are consistently absent in the trenches. "At a Calvary Near the Ancre" continues its strong censure of the Church of England as we read in the next stanzas: "The scribes on all the people shove/ And bawl allegiance to the state, / But they who love the greater love/ Lay down their life; they do not hate (Breen 47). As we discussed before, the portrait of the arrogant "priest" in the poem is an explicit and strong censure of the Church of England during the War. The priests' vanity and arrogance originate from being "flesh-marked by the Beast," that refers to slight injuries the church men may have got in the battle. However, these wounds are nonentity matched to the psychological wounds and physical injuries and mortalities among the combatants. According to Stallworthy "flesh-marked" can similarly suggest more than this: "The Devil", as it was assumed in ancient time, puts his "fingermarks on the flesh of his followers" (*The Poems*111).

Therefore, the Churchmen are considered nearer to the devil than to Jesus that is why Owen abhor them. The poem “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young” is Wilfred’s narration of a Scriptural parable (Breen 77-78). Though, the original story describes, the prophet and the father of the nation of Israel, Abraham’s submission to God’s command to slay Isaac, his son. Even though the verse is very faithful to the original text, but it forces us, from the first lines, to notice the fact that what is narrated is not a simple restating. The first two lines, “So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went, / And took the fire with him, and a knife,” straightaway make links to the Bible’s narrative; as the setting of the verse is WWI, Abram’s topic, clearly alludes the Churchmen and the Statesmen of the poet’s period. Hence, the victim of the tale, Isaac, is a clear mention to the young sons of Europe i.e. the combatants in the trenches. The poem continues: “Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps, / And builded parapets and trenches there” (line 7-8). The selection of the term “youth,” which can be plural and singular, is suitable for Isaac and the young soldiers. In keeping with Stallworthy, the mentions to “belts and straps” is a part of a combatant’s kit (151). In addition, the construction of the “trenches” associates the parable with the WWI dug outs. The Biblical parable is an evidence to the devotion of Abraham to God and a sample of Divinity’s compassion, forgiveness and love. Here, the story opens in the same way, introducing the youthful son on the platform, ready to be slaughtered. As we read in the original parable, by sending a ram to be slaughtered and offered as an alternative, God tries to save the innocent son. Here a meaningful deviation from the Scriptural parable starts. As we have in most of Sassoon’s poetry, his young disciple concludes with a strong sarcasm and extremely satiric ending: “But the old man would not so, but slew his son, / And half the seed of Europe, one by one” (Breen 78). Ignoring God’s order, Abram slaughters Isaac, in so doing he concludes the tale of the folks of God. Accordingly, Owen denounces mercilessly all people in charge who are responsible of sending young innocent and submissive soldiers to the frontlines in the WWI. Totally different from the father’s devotion to God in the Biblical parable, the verse portrays human’s wickedness prevailing God’s mercy and compassion. The outstanding usage of the Scriptural parable by Owen is to let him argue strongly and to make him able to condemn the Churchmen’s manipulation of the Bible for conscription. The name “Abram” is used instead of the Biblical name “Abraham”, which means “father of many”, to double Owen’s condemnation of the Government and the Church of England to convey the truth that they are neither representing God nor are backed by Him which makes their persistence on sacrificing “the youth” indefensible. A ram is offered in the Biblical version instead of the son but in Wilfred’s allegorical masterpiece, more exact title is provided: “Behold! Caught in a thicket by its horns, / A Ram. Offer the Ram of Pride instead”, which indicates that Politicians and Churchmen are reluctant to kill their “Pride” instead of the young soldier’s lives (78). As a combatant who witnessed and experienced the ghastly agonies of the young fighters in the Great War, Owen links Isaac properly to the innocent victims, of falsehood of the message of the warmongers, politicians and the religious institutions, who are the real subject of his poetry_ “War” (81). In this poem, from one hand, Owen does not idealize or romanticize the innocent youth, and from the other hand, he does not overlook them.

According to Wilkinson, “The comradeship of the trenches was described in language from the Gospels” (12). “Dulce et Decorum est” by Owen pitilessly presents shocking clashes such as decease and emotive misery and pain. However, instead of the religious language of sublimity, spirituality, studentship and comradeship, Owen removes any magnificent depiction of fellowship: “In all my dreams, before my helpless sight, / He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning” (Breen 50). And in the few last lines he interconnects the last soldier’s wheezing inhalations and exhalations with the action of throwing his comrade combatant into a coach. As we find in Owen’s poem “Nocturne,” he gravely raises his worries passionately, worshipfully, and reverently to God: “God rest all souls in toil and turbulence, / All men a-weary

seeking bread; / God rest them all tonight!" (38). Owen's tone is not the same in his verse "The Last Laugh", for he inclines more to profanity and disrespect than prayer: "'Oh Jesus Christ! I'm hit, 'he said and died. / Whether he vainly cursed, or prayed indeed, / The bullets chirped, —In vain! vain! vain!'" (73). He insults the Bible and God himself through using frivolously Jesus Christ's name for nothing. In doing so he directs his audiences to denounce religion itself rather than the Churchmen. This criticism can be seen also in his mail to his mom where he defies the biased Lord notion. Talking about God's speech, Owen asserts that "Is it spoken in English only, and French? I do not believe so. Thus you see how pure Christianity will not fit in with pure patriotism" (Stallworthy, *Wilfred* 186). "Disabled" is another verse in which he removes his attention from the question if the Lord was truly supporting the Church and Government of England in their war with the so-called devilish Germans or not. He proves the young fighter's faithlessness and lack of trust to the idea that God is in their side. Talking about the conscription of an incapacitated young combatant, he says, "Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt, / And Austria's, did not move him" (Breen 52). He criticizes the concept of one-sided God also to display the deceptiveness of such philosophy, religiously and as an instrument for conscription, in both "Disabled" and "Greater Love". Using such a discursive and derogatory language, he defies the spiritual and governmental organizations which promote such philosophy. In the inaugural lines, directing us to understand and admit the dreads and shocks of the WWI, through saying that: "Red lips are not so red / As the stained stones kissed by the English dead", this subject has been raised by Owen in his poems "Greater Love" as well (54). While narrating the gloomy and sympathetic attitude with the second person perspective, he uses a phrase that differs from the other parts of the poem: "Your slender attitude/ Trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewed, / Rolling and rolling there/ Where God seems not to care; (54). In the last line, which appears in his letter to Susan Owen, he openly challenges the Lord's genuine goodness. Owen's poem "Inspection", influenced stylistically and thematically by Sassoon as well as his slang language and colloquialism, is a good example. "You! What d'you mean by this?" I rapped. / "You dare come on parade like this?" / "Please, sir, it's" "'Old yer mouth," the sergeant snapped. / "I takes is name, sir?" - "Please, and then dismiss" (Breen 47). This poem considered as a turning point in his poetry, stylistically. In this regards, Douglas Kerr in his article "The Disciplines of the Wars: Army Training and the Language of Wilfred Owen" (1992), describes how before the Great War, Wilfred was interested in "romantic self-expression" (287). But "Inspection" is not a poem of romantic expression or versification. In the third stanza we find more powerful images like: "The world is washing out its stains," he said. / "It doesn't like our cheeks so red: / Young blood's its great objection" (48) which suggest that blood means guilt, and the Great War is represented as a purifier and guilt-washer by slaughtering innocent young soldiers. In this stanza the allusion to "the damned spot" is a direct reference to Macbeth by William Shakespeare where blood is identical with fault and guiltiness. As the "Field Marshal God" is a kind of direct insult and questioning God and theology as well. Here God Himself is declared to be the direct responsible for the butchery of the soldiers and once more criticized. He is not an insensible Lord or a "blank heart" God, but He is a more responsible Lord as Owen sees Him torturing young people and killing them intentionally to purify the world of its sins as He did with Jesus Christ. The poem "Anthem for Doomed Youth" by Owen in which he condemns the somberness, earnestness as well as magnificence of demise through application of symbols and codes of Roman-Catholicism to engender rage or "highlight the mismatch between organized religion and the reality on the ground", is a good example of the kind of poetry that questions theology and religious philosophy itself openly (Cavill et al 365). The poem opens with a simile and a serious question: "What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?" He protests against and rejects the serious private funeral service, instantaneously. Referring to the soldiers as livestock, and not regarding the seriousness of the funeral ceremony, he focuses on the darkness and dreadfulness of demise and compares it with gloomy and wrathful scenes of battle. The fighters are welcomed by the "hasty orisons" of rifle shots, rather than

sound and expressive supplications, and the murdered soldiers are dismissed with “demented choirs of wailing shells” rather than a sorrowful ecclesiastical chorus. These ecclesiastical scenes are used to censure Christianity as well as the concepts of salvation and evangelism. Almost similar to the spirituality and Godly concepts offered by the Churchmen, the associated choirs, orisons, and bells anticipated to give peace and pleasure are misrepresented by the actualities of battle. In this context, what Alan Wilkinson remarks is true that the poet tried to examine the “biblical and Christian images and doctrines to see whether they will bear the weight of the increasing revulsion he felt against the slaughter” (113). He compares a soldier’s life ahead of WWI, when he was loved and cheered by all, and his unwelcomed presence and life, on a wheelchair after the war, in his poem “Disabled”. The bitter truth was considered just as a commonplace and wounding gratitude for the young man’s devotion and damage and harm: “Only a solemn man who brought him fruits / Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul” (Breen 52). In the same way, once more, the First World War challenges the impacts of the promise of redemption, salvation as well as grace. In fact he writhed constantly with such thoughts. As it has been expounded in an article by Welland, Wilfred considered faith to be “at variance with poetry” (43). Consecutively, he was not able to discharge religion enthusiastically. The bitter truth of being, simultaneously, young and “Disabled” makes him challenges his readers to sympathize with physical damage and loss. Furthermore, he acknowledged the possibility that his audiences will not discard willingly their religious convictions. Commenting on Owen’s philosophy, Douglas Kerr states that: “Both preacher and poet must recognize themselves to be privileged beings; but for their words to be most widely effective, they had to find a common tongue” (Voices 112). Even though, he was questioning Christianity, the Churchmen, Theology, and even God Himself brutally, but his Roman-Catholic background was always retelling him not to ignore the power and influence of Christianity and Theology. He obviously appreciated the spirituality of his childhood and young age and witnessed the supremacy of this in the middle of battle, and received the sights of Jesus Christ in the middle of the bloodshed. With the passage of time and his maturity in his versification, in conjunction with the disapprovals, Wilfred did his best to keep and cherish such sights and glimpses. Indeed, Owen was using religious convictions in his poetry for higher goal. There is the same developmental vibe in his other magnum opus “Strange Meeting” which opens mystifyingly, generating a scene of a seepage from the warzone:

Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
 Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
 Then, as I propped them, one sprang up and stared
 With piteous recognition in fixed eyes, of
 Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.
 And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,
 By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell. (65)

The harshness of the war and Owen’s ultimate terminus inferno are depicted in his bitterly sarcastic usage of the terms “escape,” “bless,” as well as “smile”. “Whatever hope is yours, / Was my life also”, in these lines we find that Wilfred uses the second person, “yours”, to show resemblance between the killer and the killed to be able to uncover the bitter reality of the Great War. “Strange Meeting” is a best example of perfection of harmony between Christianity and aestheticism, as a new way which is more than sheer sarcasm and mockery, through depicting his frontline experiences. Douglass Kerr perceptively remarks that, he “learned from Sassoon how to be a war poet. But he brought, to the realistic

treatment of war, subjects he had learned from Sassoon, and understanding of war and a discourse of war poetry that was more radical and more desolate than his friends" (Voices, 330-331). In his poetry, Owen's concentration is mostly on strong compassion and sympathy towards comrades and fellow troops in the battlefields. However, this can be due to his Anglican background that Goldensohn observes is true that: "Of all the soldier-poets, his concentration on his fellows is most arresting and provocative and also exists in the purest arc of definition" (50). The best example is his unique poem "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo" in which he finds the Lord in his innocent young fellow fighters in the middle of that cruelty, bloodshed, and viciousness. This vision has been explained in the opening lines of the poem: "I, too, saw God through mud, / The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches smiled. / War brought more glory to their eyes than blood, / And gave their laughs more glee than shakes a child" (58). Similarly in a letter to his friend Osbert Sitwell (July 1918), he compares those who were serving in the war with Christ and even the Lord Himself and visualizes the situation:

I was at work—teaching Christ to lift his cross by numbers, and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine he thirst until after the last halt. I attended his supper to see that there were no complaints; and inspected his feet that they should be worthy of the nails...With a piece of silver I buy him every day, and with maps I make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha. (Goldensohn 80)

The poet describes the young soldiers he trained before going back to the front as if they are "Christ" and he associates them with God. His focalization on them is full of sublimity and excellence which influences his readers overwhelmingly to see them as the champions, supermen, and heroes. He also stimulated his reader to identify with the young soldiers who had been abused. His shifting point of view is obviously reflected in many of his poems. Some examples are "Dulce Et Decorum Est" when Owen pronounces the ending accusation ("My friend, you would not tell with such high zest"), or in "Strange Meeting" when Owen issues his condemnation ("I am the enemy you killed..."), as well as in "Apologia Pro Poemate Meo" when he concludes his poem with the line "You are not worth their merriment" (113). His writing in second person point of view gathers the reader's attention to the importance of his message which creates a link between the reader and the young combatants. In doing so, Owen forces the audience to respond properly to the message. He acknowledged the philological and literary supremacy of the Church as well as the Churchmen and he tried to use it for his own objectives.

As matter of fact, Wilfred utilized Christianity and Spirituality in a more multifarious way. Quoting Norgate, Kerr describes how Wilfred was a more "subtle provisional discourse" than other combatant poets who "unquestionably reference back to religion, tradition, sacrifice and so on" (327). However, he quarantined the magniloquence of politicians and churchmen then expressed it with satire and sarcasm. Owen moved farther, for his perception of religion and spirituality and its huge impact on human life and destiny was deeper than his contemporary war poets. As stated by Omid in the work "Sassoon and Owen's Depressive and Melancholic Tone of Loss":

Stressing on the pains, sufferings and frustration following all kinds of losses humanity can have in war, Owen attempted to create an everlasting war-phobia as he utilised his powerful sense of exasperation to be able to make a sense of sympathy for the combatants in the trenches. (34)

In quest of trustworthiness and faithfulness, he refused totally postwar perfectionism promised by the Church and Government. Owen showed the abuse of Jesus Christ spiritual philosophy. He recognized the supremacy of Jesus' message to human-beings to strongly convey the events happening in the Great War. Owen's position, brilliantly coming through in his war poems, express a world-view that initiated its materialization in his backgrounds. In general, Wilfred himself

discarded Christianity, but, we cannot deny its huge eternal influence on his style and subject of writing. He realized the power of religion that is why Owen used his poems as an instrument to show the religious threats. For him war was not only battle of virtuous and sinful or good or bad. His poetry helped to display the clashes between religious conviction and what was happening in the western front lines.

CONCLUSIONS

According to Omid in his paper “World War One and Homoeroticism, Wilfred, Siegfried, and the Merger of Sadism and Masochism”: “being involved directly in the horrors and pains caused by The Great War and observed and absorbed the violence of the frontlines and the human cost of war, Wilfred was able to report repetitively the fears and agonies of The First World War” (130). Indeed, Owen considered WWI as a very complicated and substantial event. Owen was protesting against the Church and Government, especially in some of his allegoric verses, who were not caring for the pains and agonies of the fighters in the battlefields and who were manipulating Christianity and Nationalism in the propaganda machine for their benefit. Many poets have written about wars of which they have had no direct experience. However, the combatant poet Owen has the firsthand experience and actual knowledge of what war can do, both to the body and to the psyche. As a matter of fact, Wilfred’s technique of uncovering the reality of war came through irony, sarcasm and his own unique para-rhyme style. He shows full disregard and scorn for the Church and its leaders, offering them practically no admiration in his poems. Indeed, his sarcastic and ironic style in some of his poems is a harsh criticism of the Churchmen’s exhibiting rhetoric of the idealistic devotion and commitment to country, Christianity and death. He refutes satirically the nonrealistic messages introduced by jingoistic poets and clergymen. He sees the clergymen more involved in the physicality of the individuals, as he needs them to fight for the church. Nevertheless, in his article “The Uncanny Concept: Wilfred Owen the Traumatized and Siegfried Sassoon the Shell Shocked”, Omid writes that the influence of war on the “human psyche is unavoidable and this human psyche_ the outcome of the peculiarities of human existence_ manifests itself in human behavior” (195). This article indicates that Owen enrolled his specific style to raise serious questions concerning, religious institutions, Churchmen, war and even God Himself. The combatants are portrayed as victims of the Church and Government in poems which are full of severely strong images including “Mental Cases”, “Apologia Pro Poemate Meo”, “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young”, “At a Calvary Near the Ancre” “Dulce Et Decorum Est”, “Inspection”, “Greater Love”, “Strange Meeting”, and “Disabled”. Most of his poems condemn the religious institutions and its leaders hugely and openly. His poetry reflects the disengagement of the religious institutions and churchmen with the genuine experiences of the fighters in the trenches, and the manipulation of spirituality and religion to evade the actual barbarities of hostilities. They transparently display the dreadful and disastrous emotive, psychological, and corporeal pains of the soldiers in the WWI. Actually, Wilfred criticizes harshly the ignorance and the negative influence of the Church on the spiritual beliefs of combatants. He sees the clergymen more involved in the physicality of the individuals, as they need them to fight for the church. The message in his poetry was to tell the public that the churchmen are abusing Christianity through unjustly relating service to God (salvation) to service to England and by doing that the clergy men are deviating individuals from religion’s sublime invitation of redemption as well as salvation. He is non-hesitant in condemning without giving religion and Christianity any opportunity to play a role in his message. He transparently displays the dreadful and disastrous emotive, psychological, and corporeal pains of the soldiers in the WWI. Actually, Wilfred criticizes harshly the ignorance and the negative influence of the Church on the spiritual beliefs of combatants. As a matter of fact, Owen, encouraged by his conservative and religious background as well as his direct experiences in The Great War, surprisingly, converted to loud speaker attacking severely the warlords, politicians

and the church who were using religion as an instrument for conscription. Wilfred's reaction to the Politicians and the Church was using poetry to condemn and disapprove the use of spirituality and religion to sponsor the war. In fact, the divinity and spirituality, promoted by the British religious institutions, which was supporting the continuation of the WWI was censured harshly by him. Therefore, for him to participate in the First World War was not "to service to God" as the "Fight for Right Movement" which was supporting the Church and the British Government was declaring (Younghusband iv).

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